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# THE MIRACLES OF JESUS

KARL · BETH

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# The Miracles of Jesus

By

KARL BETH

Professor in the University of Berlin

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# I

## Our Task

In every religion the supernatural affects man. The religious man seeks to grasp the supernatural. But the supernatural repels just as soon as it obtrudes itself in perceptible events and in a measure unveils the secret. The religious man sees himself in the struggle of these two tendencies of his being; he reaches after the supernatural and would snatch it, so imperfect does he feel himself and his world to be without it; but when he sees it he is tossed to and fro by doubts whether it is, indeed, the supernatural or merely a delusion.

The Christian religion connects one most intimately with the supernatural. It reveals it. "Without controversy, God was manifest in the flesh." How is the union of the earthly creature and the divine nature, of God and man, to be realized? It might appear as impossible as the union of water and fire. Certainly, when it takes place, something happens which lies beyond all calcu-

lation, something wholly extraordinary, a miracle. This miracle, which repeats itself in every true Christian life, is linked with the life of Jesus of Nazareth,which—apart from any dogmatical statement—represents the godly life in its highest degree. The life of Jesus is the original miracle of Christian miracles. Four Gospels record this life, and these narratives show traits in the biographical portrait, which place the divine-human being of the founder of our religion, in immediate relation to the supernatural, and lift for us the veil of mystery. The Gospels are filled with the records of the miracles of Jesus. There the supernatural projects into this our world of nature in a solidly concrete manner. In the face of these miracles the religious man recognizes a twofold position. Truly, he, on whom we found our religious life, from whom we receive "grace for grace," can authenticate himself as sent from God by works which no other can do. And yet does it harmonize with the idea of the Redeemer who intended to seek souls and lead them to God, to interfere by means of miracles with the orderly course of the world? Is not such miracle-

working written on another page than that of prophetical soul-saving ministry? Is not this trait so foreign to his otherwise known nature that pious contemplation might have rather ascribed it to him afterward? And, should Christianity in this matter move along the same line as many other religions in whose traditions miraculous deeds are also assigned to their founders and heroes, but the reality of which criticism can by no means admit? The history of religion brings before us a great mass of marvelous legends. This uniformity in religious traditions seems to point first of all to the fact that human need always led it to ascribe miraculous deeds to religious heroes, and that the same is also the case with the miracles of Jesus.

The assertion is indeed very often made that Jesus did not perform real miracles, that is, acts which could not have been possible in the usual course of natural events. It is true that not all the remarkable cures of which the Gospels speak are questioned, but they are only admitted in so far as they stand in direct analogy to that class of psychical cures, which are also accomplished

among us by suggestion, therapeutics, or magnetism. Thus the cures of Jesus appear only as psychical influences produced by his strong personality, but which, on this account, cannot be declared miraculous. Thus, from this point of view, every real miracle is rejected.

But let us see whether this estimate of the gospel miracles is necessary. The question is an historical one. One can decide against the reality of each miracle performed by Jesus without previously denying the possibility of miracles. The question of the possibility of the miraculous is entirely different from that of its historicity, especially of the miracles of Jesus. Leaving aside the question of possibility, we may try to answer the question: "What can be said of the reality of the miracles of Jesus on the basis of an historical consideration of the records?" Two points require our attention. In the first place, we may inquire whether the working of miracles belongs to the personality of Jesus; that is, whether the Messianic calling to establish the kingdom of God and to give to men a reconciled God included miraculous deeds. In the second

place, the points in question are the historical instances which set forth the reality of the miracles of Jesus. Here religio-historical analogies, which seem to deprive the miracles of Jesus of their specific position and importance, as well as of their reality, have above all things to be taken into account. Our question also reads, whether the miracles of Jesus occupy a peculiar position over against the other miracles in the history of religion or whether they occupy the same position.

## II

## What Jesus Says of the Meaning of His Miracles

Do the miracles of Jesus accord with his life and work? This is the first question. This query may be answered most positively by placing in the center of our consideration the copious testimonies which the Lord himself has given concerning his wondrous deeds. The discourses of Jesus reveal the purport of his person, and the closer they follow the work of the person the more valuable they become. If we can ascertain what Jesus himself thought of his miracles, it will be at the same time clear whether miracles stand in a positive or negative relation to his character.

We repeatedly read in the Gospels that the contemporaries of Jesus believed on him because of his miracles. This, at any rate, seems to suggest that the evangelist also occupied this position, that miracles were an excellent means for awakening faith, and that for this purpose Jesus himself per-

formed his miracles. The three synoptists and the Gospel of John agree in such expressions. In John 11. 45, we read after the raising of Lazarus: "Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him." Some, however, went to the Pharisees and embarrassed them by reporting the event (comp. John 2. 23; 7. 26-31). After the healing of the blind and dumb, the people seriously considered the question, "Is not this the son of David?" (Matt. 12. 23; comp. 9. 33, seq.) In like manner again the fourth evangelist when recording the miracle at Cana, says: Jesus "manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him" (John 2. 11). But there are not wanting clearly expressed statements that the miracles themselves as such, were not able to hold the people to Jesus. Not only sworn opponents know how to invalidate the significance of such signs; even the enthusiastic multitude makes the very feeding which it itself witnessed, a reason for turning its back upon the Master when further expectations remain unfulfilled (John 6. 66).

Jesus, however, thinks otherwise. His

miracles were not to be a condition for the faith of men. They are not intended in the least to excite faith. On the contrary, Jesus aims at nothing more than to distract attention from his miraculous deeds. We may understand this fact correctly only by considering the peculiarity of his calling and the relation into which he was brought thereby to his countrymen. He knew himself as the Messiah for whom his people were eagerly looking. He saw in himself the realization of Israel's religious hopes. But, at the same time, he knew himself to be in the keenest opposition to popular expectations. He was the Messiah, and he was not. He was the Messiah in the real meaning of God's plan; yet he did not resemble the conception which the people had of the Messiah. He brought the highest good of the kingdom of God, the good of consummation. The people expected the coming of the Messiah and that the manifestation of his benefits would be accompanied with great signs and powerful deeds. The Messiah was to play a brilliant part and to authenticate himself by incomparable miracles; "With an iron rod" was he to shake off and abase all enemies of

Israel, the Romans as well as the Herodians. It is the tragic element which runs through the life of Jesus that while wide circles of the people would acknowledge him as the Messiah, they could not recognize him as such because of that erroneous expectation. During the whole period of his captivity he had to struggle with this false Messianic idea; and he rejected those who clung only to his mighty deeds because through them their fancy was strengthened. The inner struggle was hard. The temptation was present to respond to the expectation of the people by showing himself in power; to summon more than ten thousand legions of angels. He decided against this method of asserting his Messianic call. He might thereby perhaps have advanced his fame but he would have missed his calling; for in this way he would have wholly confined the people to the worldly and the human, and would not have changed or gained their hearts.

The synoptists introduce the ministry of Jesus with the narrative which brings before us this struggle of Jesus. In the form of a program he there expresses himself with

respect to his calling. The history of the Temptation tells us with what decision from the very start, conscious of the only true path, he refused from principle every performance of a miraculous exhibition. To do this would have answered the expectation of the people who longed for a Messiah who brought about the kingdom of God full of blessing with a magic stroke by establishing an outward power, to suddenly make an end to all care of the earthly life and all distress caused by political oppression. But nothing of the kind lies in the purpose of Jesus! The kingdom of God comes not with observation. This he manifested unto the end.

We see him going through the country of Galilee relieving distress, spreading blessings. He cured a blind man who also was dumb. His opponents did not consider this cure as a sign of his divine origin. They rather ask now for a sign as a proof that that cure was not caused by the devil dwelling in him (Matt. 12. 38-45). Jesus agrees with his adversaries in one point: a miracle, be it never so surprising, cannot be considered a sign that one is sent from God. This we infer from his subsequent words. At the

same time, however, he vehemently addresses the representatives of the hierarchy: "An evil and adulterous generation (that is, according to prophetical phraseology; a generation which apostatized from the marriage covenant with God) seeketh after a sign" (Matt. 12. 39); that is, a sign which shall be self-evidencing that the performer of it is God. Those people desired to see some sudden phenomenon, a "sign from heaven" (Matt. 16. 1). The Messiahship was to be ascertained from something more wonderful than an extraordinary cure of a disease. The kingdom of God is not to be established by the spirit of Jesus, not by the gospel and repentance. Jesus judges their eagerness as the manifestation of a mania for miracles, which is an obstacle to faith. What kind of faith would that be which would thus be called forth! A sign was to take place which makes faith superfluous by demanding an apparently physical interference of God in the human world, a sign which obtains the "faith" by force. A generation, with such a mania for miracles, is "adulterous," is too far from God that it should turn inwardly to God, even in consequence of the greatest

miracle; therefore "no sign shall be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas."

What is to be understood by the sign of Jonas? The Gospel of Matthew referred the words to the resurrection of Jesus, and put this interpretation into the mouth of Jesus himself. But this resurrection which (as verse 40 states) did not take place after three days and three nights, but after two nights and one day—was it really meant by Jesus to be the infallible sign of his Messiahship? In reality it had not become such a sign. It did not take place so publicly that the adulterous generation believed thereby; in fact that generation did not receive that sign at all, but those only who believed in God. There can be no doubt that in verse 40 we have the opinion of the evangelist before us, or, rather, the interpretation of the word of Jesus handed down to him. This becomes evident from the other Gospel account of this event. In the narrative of Luke (11. 30), the point of comparison is given differently. As Jonas became a sign to the Ninevites, so the Son of man shall be to this generation. The prophet Jonas, however, became to the inhabit-

ants of the eastern city a purely spiritual sign, appropriated not so much through some physical happening but, rather, through the power of the Spirit. Jonah's courageous preaching of repentance and its powerful success proved his divine commission. In this way the God-estranged generation is to be overcome. Thus Jesus, in his personality and call to repentance and pledge of salvation, will also be the sign appointed for this generation. It is by no means necessary to think of a near or distant future when this sign shall take place. It is, rather, meant that this very sign is already present and is given now; and that hereafter no other sign shall be given than this, just as the Old Testament prophet gave it to the heathenish city.

A beautiful parallel to this word of Jesus is the parable of the obedient and disobedient sons together with its explanation (Matt. 21. 23-32). The parable is an answer to the question, 'By what authority was Jesus teaching the people? Jesus refused a direct answer because "the elders" did not reply to his question as to whence the Baptist received his authority. Now he says the call to re-

pentance of the Baptist was made in order to bring about a change of heart. In their attitude toward him the scribes resemble the disobedient son who at first promised to obey his father, but afterward thinks otherwise and will not listen to the (now in Jesus) repeated voice of the father. But the sinners who follow Jesus and are inwardly changed are like the son who at first refuses obedience and afterward repents and returns home. Here, too, the thought is decisive, that it does not require an extraordinary sign to convince man of the nearness of God; the call of repentance ought to have shown to all that God is at the door. Thus also is it with the attitude of men toward Jesus. "By what authority" he acts, and whether he is the revealed of God, is to be inferred from his presence and his teaching.

The continuation of the address of Jesus proves that the statement concerning the sign of Jonas, according to Matthew, notwithstanding the interpretation given in the text, must not be understood of a certain miraculous act. When the people of Nineveh, because they repented at the preaching

of Jonas, shall, as it were, rise up in the judgment against the Jewish scribes at the general resurrection (verse 42), the salient point is that the sign for them is the preaching of repentance. This characteristic feature of the sending of Jonas, Jesus applies to his position in Israel. When a plain prophet already made such an impression and became a credible sign, how much more must every open heart see in Jesus, in him, the Sinless One, the sign from heaven; for "here is a greater than Jonas." How often, of his work from which alone man can infer as here, Jesus refers to the uniform totality his sign of the Messiahship! He will not perform a miraculous feat in order to acquire acknowledgment at least, where curiosity, superstition, or even unbelief looks for it. He states clearly that those are in error and far from the kingdom of God who seek a manifestation of God in miraculous phenomena. The manifestation, rather, accomplishes itself in history, in the mental, historical life of humanity. There the honest-hearted will perceive the signs of God. Expressive of severe judgment on those having a mania for miracles, Christ

tells us that prodigies, as a means of awakening faith, are not to be thought of. We see Jesus here intentionally diverting attention from all kinds of magic, every kind of fetichism, everything carnal in religion. The spiritual element of the religion founded by him is emphasized in that God and his will may be known in the sphere of the spiritual. What one understands by the miracles of Jesus, wherever one occurs is not to be connected with the intention to establish religion or reveal God; all this belongs not to the "sign" which humanity must regard, in order to know by what authority Jesus spoke and acted.

The peculiarity of Jesus's conception of his miracles is thus sufficiently clear. The object of his life is this: to prepare men for his gospel and to lead them to God by influencing their minds. For this purpose his miracles are not conducible, for he knows very well that by them no sinful men become godly, and no atheist a believer in God. To this deep discerner of man the way of human reason which tries to explain to itself by natural means even the problems of the supernatural, is not unknown. The

natural man seeks after natural causes and does not reason from the miracle to the supernatural agent of the miracle. Even the "greatest" miracle—the resurrection of the dead—will not be accepted. Reason will seek for secret mundane causes and will find them. This very case Jesus emphasizes by supplying the critique on all spiritualistic longing in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man: If men believe not the living word and the Spirit of God, they will not believe, though one rose from the dead (Luke 16. 31). He only will be able to perceive in the miracles a deed of God who is already convinced of God's power and work. For this reason Jesus performs no miracles for unbelievers. For such his miracles would only provoke indifference and hardness of heart.

These thoughts we find in many expressions of Jesus. Consider, for example, his coming to his home city of Nazareth, as Luke describes it (4. 23-27). The unbelieving people have asked him to do before their eyes the same deeds as in Capernaum; but he refuses, and refers to Elias and Eliseus, who did not use the God-given power for miraculous help among Jews, but be-

stowed it upon two non-Israelites who, by their faith, were truly qualified to receive the blessing. Or, let us take the answer to the question of the Baptist, in which he emphasizes the Messianic character of his activity, and mentions miracles only in connection with the founding of the Messianic kingdom, and subordinates them to his preaching (Matt. 11. 2-6). He designates his activity as that of the promised Messiah, and refers to the Messianic time as predicted by Isaiah. Events of a wondrous nature have come to pass, but the miraculous element in them is not the main thing, but the result: that misery ceases when God's hand is stretched out in mercy and tenderness. Thus those miracles come into question only as elements in the preaching of salvation, and this is also indicated in the answer of Jesus when he commanded them to "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see." God's kingdom of blessing comes through the joyful message of Jesus, which preaching, however, is accompanied by distinctive characteristics of the happy state which is yet to be restored in God's world.

In a more decided manner is the working of miracles subordinated to that of preaching in Mark 1. 33-39. At Capernaum in the evening, Jesus healed many sick people. With the first early dawn he retires from the city to a solitary place for prayer. His disciples, led by Peter, follow after him, and, finding him, wish to bring him back to the city, as the inhabitants were seeking him. And he? "Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth." Luke, who describes more fully this event (4. 42-44), makes him say still plainer that his life's object was none other than the preaching of the kingdom of God. According to this account the multitude itself had come to Jesus and urged him not to depart from them; but he tells them plainly: "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also; for therefore am I sent."

All this proves that Jesus considered his miraculous power not as something independent of his call to repentance and the kingdom of God, nor did he wish it to be considered as such. In estimate and value as they easily appear at a superficial glance

in the synoptic Gospels, miracles are of little importance. Jesus himself does not consider them as the quintessence of his work. Nevertheless, according to our records, he so readily demonstrated his divinity by his miracles that the granting of the same must have been of decisive importance to him. Indeed, Jesus did not consider his miracles as a superfluous element of his appearance, but, as the answer to the Baptist already showed, they were for him an important element in the coming of the kingdom of God, as is seen in the fact that on the occasion on which he rebuked those who were seeking signs he again refers to his works (Matt. 12. 33, seq.; Luke 11. 14, seq.). Miraculous cures were not uncommon or unexpected among those people; there were some who boasted of such arts and were occasionally successful; hence, it was no sign of his Messiahship for the prejudiced opponents of Jesus when he cured one who was "blind and deaf" by casting out his demon. We are told that the multitude preferred, rather, the inference as to his Davidic sonship, that is, his Messiahship; the Pharisees, however, opposed it by saying: "He casts out the

demons not with the help of God, but as an associate of the head of the devils, the lord of the kingdom of demons." Over against this accusation Jesus proves the absurdity of such a charge, since he would thus destroy the kingdom itself with which he is in league. This being impossible, he can only act through the Spirit of God; and where demons are cast out there the kingdom of God has come unto men (Matt. 12. 28).

In this way Jesus manifests his matchless activity against the powers of darkness as part of his divine plan; not that faith in his divinity would be weakened by such intervention, but that the powers of evil should thereby be restrained and the way prepared for the government of God. All his cures may be regarded from the same point of view. The cure of the man sick of the palsy (Mark 2. 3-13), with its pointed reference to forgiveness of sins, is an illustration. The proceedings on this occasion could, indeed, soonest make the impression that Jesus performed a miraculous cure in order that unbelievers also might acknowledge his divine mission; but such is not the case, for we find not the

least indication that the cure produced faith among the scribes; and the events themselves, notwithstanding verse 10, allow not the opinion that Jesus intended to awaken the faith of the incredulous. Here, as elsewhere, he promised to the sick the forgiveness of his sins. The hierarchs looked upon it as blasphemy. To purge himself from this reproof he suggests to those people their judgment on the bodily cure now to be accomplished, namely, that he cannot only promise something whose actual occurrence cannot be controlled by men, but also something which at once must either prove itself valid or invalid. He could have cured the sick man without this illustration of his work which was provoked by his adversaries, for not to heal was wholly against his custom. The circumstances, however, offered at this time the opportunity to call attention to the connection of his preaching of the kingdom with the conveyance of earthly blessing.

Answering this conception of the Messianic calling, Jesus combined with it the works of divine love and mercy. As Jesus decidedly expressed himself against the as-

sumption that every particular disease is a consequence of a sin, so also was he convinced that there did exist a general organic connection between physical evil and religio-moral deficiency. The latter is perceived as the real cause of the depth of the physical sphere. Moral deficiency exercises a generally degenerating influence, analogous to the depressing effect which the sinking of the spiritual level of a person exercises upon his entire embodiment. That defect in the domain of the human nature is a sequence of apostasy from God, hereditary in humanity; a sequence thereof, that men deny their God-relationship by their practical life and effort, comes out in the teaching and working of Jesus. It was, therefore, in the interest of his calling to remove, in the first place, the distress of souls, and at the same time also to abolish the bodily misery organically connected with this distress of the soul. Jesus was inwardly moved to help physically where he helped spiritually; and this doubly apparent wondrous help is nothing else than the immediate practical proof of the divine will of love. As often as the Father moved him Jesus showed his

divinely helping love. Helping and blessing, saving and redeeming, his mercy interposed also in the outward life of individuals. Not only healing diseases, raising the dead, feeding the multitude, but, in general, all the miracles which he performed were emanations of this compassion over spiritual wretchedness, which inclined to bodily distress in order to completely finish its work.

Let us look back! Jesus came to found the kingdom of God; to lead men into it, and thus bring them to a voluntary submission to God's government. The proper means for that is the preaching of glad tidings which only he can accept whose heart is changed, whose mind is directed toward repentance. But it belongs to the Messianic task to overcome not only the ethico-religious wretchedness of remoteness from God and of being forsaken by God, but also physical natural misery in its different forms. This natural suffering Jesus regards as the disorder of the divinely arranged relations in the human world, in which Satan's rule has entered. The complete victory of God belongs, indeed, to the future; but the blows which Jesus strikes

the power of darkness are an earnest and pledge of the world's renovation. So far as saving miracles are signs, they are not such for the divine authority of Jesus, but only of the love of the heavenly Father and the coming of his kingdom.

This ethico-religious regeneration is not merely the more important element in the endeavor of Jesus; it is also the essential preliminary condition for the effectuation of the love which shows itself in Jesus's miracles of mercy. His miracles can only take place where there is a disposition toward God, or has at least commenced. No miracle is done to break unbelief; but where it is broken, God's power is visible. For an extraordinary physical event has never the ability to convince men who are lacking in religious and moral willingness; and, because miracles, on the one hand, are the accessory phenomena of the Messianic work, and on the other, must remain unintelligible to unbelief, Jesus never referred to them, properly speaking. Connected with this is the fact that by no means did he think miraculous power "as robbery," the possession of which he alone had to secure. Being

conscious of possessing it in consequence of his immediate communion with God, he was not afraid to convey it to everyone who, like him, lives in the will of God. This trait makes clear anew the difference between the Messiahship and the miraculous power of Jesus; the former belonged to him exclusively. When thinking of it he emphasized his person as unique which, unlike anyone else, stands in essential connection with God. He and he alone has to bring the glad tidings. He and he alone can give remission of sins and establish the kingdom of God. But the power of working miracles he gave to undefiled faith generally. Where there is a man who in every moment is absolutely sure of his God—to whom, indeed, also absolutely moral purity belongs—there "all things are possible" (Mark 9. 23).

Thus far we have purposely followed only the synoptic tradition. The Johannean record requires a separate treatment, because it may seem and it has been repeatedly affirmed, that John and the Johannean Jesus ascribed to miracles a far greater and at the same time, a more external importance. The objectors to the genuineness of the

fourth Gospel freely emphasize the fact that the Johannean Jesus, as distinguished from the synoptic, makes much of his person and his miracles; and it is remarkable indeed that we have here statements of Jesus concerning his miracles which read entirely different. Was it impossible to assign to the synoptic Jesus the idea that his miraculous power should or only could, awaken belief in man? In the fourth Gospel more than once we hear from the mouth of Jesus that his miraculous deeds were to serve Revelation and Faith. Thus (John 9. 3) before healing the man who was born blind Jesus says that his blindness is not in consequence of sin, either of the parents or of the sufferer himself, but in order that "the works of God should be made manifest in him," and at once. Jesus puts his healing ministry parallel with his ministry of enlightening the world. At the report of the sickness of his friend, Lazarus, he says to the disciples: "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." When he hears of his death he says to his disciples: "I am glad for your sakes that I

was not there, to the intent ye may believe" (John 11. 15). Before the raising of Lazarus he openly thanks God because of the people which stood by (verse 42) "that they may believe that thou hast sent me."

Have we here, indeed, a different conception of the importance of the miracles than in the synoptists? This question can not be answered by considering the quoted words alone; we can only decide upon it when other Johannean words of Jesus on miracles are also considered. Nevertheless, something can be stated here. Jesus does not say that by this miraculous cure his divine glory should be manifest, but that "the works of God" should be brought near to men. And the further connection of the thought proves irrefutably that the fundamental conception of Jesus, as to the place of his miracles, according to the Johannean account, is none other than that of the synoptists. For the miraculous cure is included in the works of God which latter, according to verses 4 and 5, are just the works which Jesus does in order to fulfill his calling as the Light of the world; or, as it might be expressed according to the synop-

tists, in order to establish the kingdom of God with the help of the accompanying deeds of blessing. The healing, therefore, belongs to the large class of works of Jesus, which we shall consider later.

Concerning the words quoted from the story of Lazarus, the first two are addressed to the disciples who are not classed with unbelievers. When at the resurrection the intention, nevertheless, prevailed that the Son of God should be glorified and the disciples "come to believe," it cannot mean that they should be converted from unbelief to faith. We are compelled, however, to affirm, according to the synoptists, that absolute faith is not a condition for experiencing a miracle, but the direction of the spirit toward God, and the will aspiring after God, which on their part by the perception of the miracle can indeed become strengthened. What is not clear is the word spoken with respect to the people standing by (verse 42). It will be seen that the Johannean discourses of Jesus offer no grounds for the supposition that Jesus ever insisted that his miracles were means for awakening faith. Only on the supposition that among the surrounding

Jews who were mostly friends of Mary and Martha, the necessary religious disposition existed for the right acceptance of the miracle, does the word spoken with respect to the people conform to the idea of Jesus, which is, moreover, to be elicited from the record. His prayer, that these people, in virtue of this resurrection, might come to belief in his divine mission, denotes then that their yet imperfect faith might come to the true Christian belief in the operation of divine grace.

The dispute with the Jews, recorded in chapter 10. 32-38 (comp. 14. 11), admits also of no other conception. When they endeavored to stone him Jesus referred to the "many good works from my Father," which he "showed" them. The "works" appear here as the only refuge which he has over against their charge of blasphemy: "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him." Did he therein state that he performed miracles for the purpose of moving the Jews to faith? This could not have

been the meaning, if by works miracles were to be understood. For one must not overlook that Jesus makes a concession here which, according to the nature of the concession, is far from making known his real view.

For these and like statements in the Gospel of John it is very important that under the works of the Lord his miracles are not to be understood. True, there is also no reason for excluding miracles from the interpretation of works; but they are not thought of as in the first place. When Jesus says that his meat consists in his life-purpose, to finish the work intended by God (4. 34), he designates the discharge of his life-task as the work of God, namely, his endeavor that men should believe and obtain eternal life. And it means the same whether he speaks of his Father, or of his own work, whether of work in the singular or of works in the plural. His works are not single miraculous deeds in the realm of nature, but they consist in bringing about the kingdom of God, which begins on this side through spiritual quickening and shall be completed only at the general resurrection of the dead

and the last judgment (verses 20-29). On this account he does not think of his miracles when conscious that his works testify of him; his divine sending is attested rather by his Messianic ministry (verse 36).

This must be borne in mind for the understanding of a text like 15. 24: "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father." This means that whoever has experienced the ministry of Jesus, his preaching of death and life, together with his bestowal of blessings, without humbling his mind and without opening his heart to faith, has committed the fundamental sin—unbelief. The "works" of Jesus produce faith provided man is not impenitent. His miracles in themselves have no such power. That the miracles are out of the question verse 22 proves, where Jesus mentions his "coming and speaking" instead of his works.

Considering this understanding of the words of Jesus, we find that the principle is expressed more strikingly and more frequently in John than in the synoptists that

the signs which God gives to men are not wondrous events in nature or outward history but the Lord's preaching of repentance and salvation. The Gospel of John, too, has preserved the direct rejection of all mania for miracles, and of a faith accommodating itself to miracles. It is here most severely expressed in the words: "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (4. 48); and against this reproach is set the praise of those who believe without seeing (20. 29). In general, it is mere assertion which cannot be proved that in the fourth Gospel the miracles play a greater part and are exaggerated, as if the author intended to demonstrate faith in Jesus as the divine Logos by greater miracles. The difference between John and the synoptists on this point is just the opposite. While the account of the synoptists is so excessively unbiased that we would think that Jesus possessed inherent power of miracle, and while sometimes the idea seems to be that Jesus walked among men like a miracle-worker, practicing magic, according to the Johannean tradition Jesus refers his miraculous power to a continual connection with

the heavenly Father who in any particular individual case consents to a performance of the miracle. Here every magical idea is absolutely precluded. The personal God is in him with his own working and impulse. The personality of Jesus becomes thus more intelligible to us; it becomes more lucid to us by the testimony of the beloved disciple who understood best the uniqueness of his Master.

Very clear—to refer to it again—is the statement made to the sign-seekers in the fourth Gospel (6. 25, seq.). In spite of the miraculous feeding the people in their carnally religious expectation are not satisfied. Like the Pharisees they wish to see something very extraordinary, according to the synoptic tradition, in connection with the healing of the demoniac. The feeding of five thousand people with a few loaves is not acknowledged as a sign which proves the Messiah. Notwithstanding this miracle Jesus is considered by the people lower than Moses, because the latter brought bread down from heaven visibly. They do not consider the fact that the fathers also had not recognized that the bread in the wilder-

ness was a gift of heaven. The wonder of the past as such obtains in their thought a higher character than this miracle, and their demand is that he who is sent from God should again legitimatize himself by this, that he give them a sign from heaven. In the answer of Jesus we have the complete correlate to the address preserved by the synoptists directed to the leaders of the people having a mania for miracles. In like tenor Jesus denies that by the gift of Moses's manna, he gave a sign to the fathers. It was not Moses but God who gave the sign. And it is God who now gives in these days, continually the sign which was once given in the wilderness, according to the opinion of the people; the true, genuine bread "which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (verse 33). And at once Jesus makes a personal application: "I am the bread of life" (verse 35). The meaning is, accordingly: "I, myself, I, as preacher of the gospel, as bringer of life, am the sign which you ask." The rejection of the mania for miracles is indicated here just as in Matt. 12. The true Bread of Life by John and the Jonas' sign by the synop-

tists are essentially the same. "You have seen and heard me," says the Lord, "and this is sufficient that you should believe (verse 36). From my whole person, the works and words which proceed from me, everyone must understand, that my message is the divine truth, the true religion, and that the Father hath sealed me" (verse 27). It requires no material sign to grasp the divine truth as divine; it needs only a purely spiritual penetration to experience the revelation in a living manner. We think here also of the teaching which emphasizes a sense for God, and an endeavor for a life founded in God, as the principal condition; and, indeed, as the only one for an understanding of the revelation of God: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7. 17). Jesus does not refer at all to the miraculous feeding, as if it were, perhaps, a sign of his origin or of his peculiar essence and might lead human perception into the right path. Whoever demands phenomena—extraordinary, powerful deeds—as evidences of the divine will be a loser; he is lacking in

the principal condition for religious knowledge.

The outcome of what has thus far been said is this: Neither the Gospel of John nor the synoptic Gospels offer a reasonable support for the supposition that Jesus performed his miracles in order to awaken faith by them. At best he regarded them only as the means of strengthening faith already existing. Miracles are the self-evident outflow of that same compassionate love which wishes and creates the kingdom of God, and this purpose they serve only indirectly. In John's Gospel (9. 3) as well as in the first three Gospels, human misery appears as the factor which induces Jesus to bring miraculous help, on the assumption that faith already exists which can esteem his work as an emanation of the divine love. The interest of the evangelists in the miraculous may, after all, be different in both cases; yet both accounts permit us to perceive with desirable clearness the estimate in which Jesus held his miracles. There is yet another trait which shows in a peculiar manner how both narratives, notwithstanding various differences, still supply us with the

same religiously important facts. I refer to the parallel of John 6. and Matthew 16. All ethics agree that in both instances we are at the same historical place. The feeding is followed by the rejection of the superficial and only too carnally-minded Galilean masses. Those who now faithfully abide with Jesus have passed through a crisis to which the multitude succumbed. The faithful have thus arrived at a height of their religious life. John transmits to us a word from the mouth of a disciple, spoken on this new height of knowledge attained by the band of disciples, confessing without reserve that the faith of the disciples did not have its origin in witnessing miracles. When many followers in consequence of disappointed expectations had turned from the Master he asks the closer circle of his twelve, whether they too would leave him. Then Peter answered: "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that thou art the Holy One of God" (John 6. 67, seq.). The disciple expresses the religious experience by which he is overpowered; not any outward sign, not any miraculous act has

led him to believe, but the "words of life" out of the mouth of the Lord—the gospel itself. According to the synoptists Jesus, after his failure among the Galilean population, went to the northwest, beyond the limits of Palestine; and when in these days of itinerancy with the disciples he approached Cæsarea Philippi he asks his disciples that remarkable question what they thought of him (Matt. 16. 13, seq.; Mark 8. 27, seq.). At the full acknowledgment of his Messiahship, which Peter makes, Jesus expresses the same canon on religious knowledge which, according to John, Peter formulated in other words. Jesus is convinced that nothing in the realm of visible events, nothing that belongs to the sphere of earthly happenings, has brought about the faith of the disciple. "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." It is a direct divine effect when man comes to this condition of faith. Man does not become certain of the divine through influences which come from the life in flesh and blood, though such were ever so wonderful and extraordinary, but by this, that the source of the spiritual life

is opened to the heart in the gospel of Jesus.

Such being the case, one might easily be led to think that according to the view of Jesus the miraculous in general could not be an object of faith. But this would evidently be going too far. There is, indeed, no doubt that in the working of miracles he gave no room to the thought that they should become objects of faith. Nevertheless, it was not the thought of Jesus either that one should deny offhand that his miracles can and ought to be believed. Only they cannot be objects of nascent faith. From a certain height of faith only can one perceive the fact and significance of a miracle. That Jesus wrought wonders is not to be inserted into the spiritual possession of a man who through a living, spiritual experience has not already possessed faith in the divine dignity of Jesus.

Jesus himself is the great miracle, given for a sign to humanity; who, therefore, in his sinlessness can dare to convince all of their sinfulness, can dare to convince all of sin and to call all to repentance; who, by virtue of a divine authority subjects all

hearts to himself. This is Jesus's own declaration, and, let us add, also the declaration of his great apostle Paul. He traversed the world with the message of Jesus, the Miraculous One, who works in the souls of men the miracle of miracles. But nowhere in his epistles does he refer in proof of it to a single miraculous deed of the Lord, just as he never mentions any of the miracles performed by himself as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, although he had occasion for doing so. The only historical miracle to which his preaching refers is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead; but this event stands for him in the center of his entire view of life. Beyond this, miraculous events have evidently no significance for his view of the world, or for his religious experience. He knows that in all his labors he is directly under the miraculous guidance of Almighty God, and that he receives from the Lord Christ spiritual power which is made perfect in weakness. He lives with the conviction that Jesus is the Messiah sent of God; that from the place of his heavenly exaltation he establishes, increases, preserves the holy congregations on earth.

He believes in that miracle which is presented to the world in Jesus and his preaching, his death and his resurrection. In his missionary labors he is entirely removed from directing attention to the miraculous acts of the Lord.

# III

## What We Can Say on the Historicity of the Miracles of Jesus

We have seen that the miracles of Jesus are to be estimated not only as a constituent part but also as an integral part of his entire Messianic calling. The first of these two questions has been decided in the affirmative; miracles make no break either in the personality or in the calling of Jesus. We turn to the second question: What can be ascertained purely historically concerning the *reality* of the miracles of Jesus? It has already been pointed out that the question as to the reality of the miracles of Jesus has two sides. Here we do not deal with the question as to whether miracles are, on the whole, possible and conceivable, but solely with the purely historical question, *whether historical instances can be obtained for the reality of the miracles of Jesus.* But this question also demands division. In the first place, it comes in the form whether anything can be ascertained relative to the

reality of miracles from a consideration of the state of the gospel tradition. In the second place, the religio-historical consideration obtrudes itself with power. Antiquity is rich in miracles which, like the miracles of Jesus in the new Testament, are ascribed both to heroes of heathenish mythology and legend, and also to truly historical personalities. Thus the problem is not to be rejected, but must present itself to every man, to every Christian: If the miracles of Jesus are to be accepted from Christian sources as historical facts, should one not judge with the same certainty as to the historicity of the miracles handed down in heathendom? On the other hand: If we hesitate to accept the miracles of heathenism, in which we see, perhaps, purely fictitious legend, should we not also deny the reality of the miracles of Jesus? To both of these questions we now turn our attention.

It may seem that, on the whole, one must concede that on the ground of historical inquiry he cannot assert something about the reality of an object which is supernatural, and which therefore lies outside the circle of events which we call historical. Without

doubt this is correct; history can never speak the last word in such questions. How will one prove the historicity of a thing which, according to its very historical connection between cause and effect, is undiscernible? How will one establish a miracle through historical and literary inquiry? Such being the case, the other is also impossible: to try to prove the unhistoricity of the miracle records of the Gospel with the aid of historical inquiry. For history as such has for the same reason no right to speak on that subject. Through historical inquiry we may be able to find out instances, probability arguments for or against the reality of a recorded miracle; and we shall soon see that from the gospel records themselves a number of reasons can be referred to for the historicity of the miracles which, just as far as historical arguments are able, speak in favor of the reality of those miracles.

To be sure, an establishment in this sense of the facts for miracles would be impossible if at the outset the credibility of the records were as doubtful as is often supposed; if, in the "Christ-picture of faith,"

which the Gospels offer, nothing else were to be seen than the picture of the historical Jesus adorned with a rich wreath of wondrous stories invented by religious enthusiasm for the person of Jesus, and otherwise distorted into the supernatural. Where such an opinion as this prevails, the attributing of miracles to Jesus is explained as the unavoidable consequence of Jewish belief in Jesus's Messianic dignity. In keeping with the Jewish Messianic expectation, early Christian believers simply had the wondrous deeds of the Old Testament men of God repeated and surpassed by Jesus. Thus the miracles ascribed to Jesus are criticized away without difficulty, as the imputation of sentimental belief. A critique of this kind neutralizes itself, since it results in nothing but the greatest inconsequence. Negative criticism gladly accepts those words of Jesus which he delivered to those demanding a sign against the performance of an extraordinary miracle. No one objects to the idea that this attitude of Jesus is historical. But when it is to be inferred from this that in reality Jesus did no miracles, that he refused to perform any miracle, negative criti-

cism is forced to consider all words of Jesus which refer to the accomplishment of any certain miracle, either as invented or as handed down in the record completely distorted. Discourses of Jesus which refer to a miracle which took place, or was to take place, are found in great number, and form the most important evidence against the denial of miracles, for these numerous words would completely hang in the air if the respective miracles had not taken place. Thus, for instance, the words spoken to the Pharisees before the healing of the man sick of the palsy (Matt. 9. 5, 6). The record is so unique that one cannot explain how such words could have been invented had there been no miracle. Think, also, of the discourse which refers to the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 16. 18, seq.), or of the answer to the Baptist (Matt. 9. 4, seq.), or of the discourse on the Sabbath question called forth by healing of the sick (three times according to the synoptists). The very clear historical picture, against which no objection can lie, is this: that very extraordinary deeds were performed by Jesus which only emanated from his mercy, or

now and then were performed perhaps for the purpose of symbolizing a higher, worldly wisdom. At the same time it is by no means necessary that all astonishing deeds of Jesus are to be understood as real miracles. It is possible that a large number of these do not go beyond the measure of that psycho-physical superiority, which is also found in rare cases among men. A great number of cures may be directly paralleled to strange cures of later times. The Gospels themselves do not speak of all remarkable deeds of the Lord as having been real miracles; yet we have a number of events, also of cures, which can only be looked upon as real miracles.

It is only over against satisfying the mania for miracles that Jesus refused to perform miracles. To refuse a sign is by no means peculiar in the attitude of Jesus. It is in harmony with his attitude toward other matters, and is mainly the application of his fixed purpose to this special thing. For this one fact is absolutely certain: that Jesus neither did nor did he intend to answer to the Jewish popular expectation, according to which the kingdom of God had to come

with observation; and that the Messiah had to surpass in mighty wonders everything that had occurred before. His whole life was a continually strained protest against this false popular expectation. But when the Gospels mean to make known and describe to us most clearly this very struggle against the Jewish expectation we cannot suppose that they had yielded at the same time to the impulse to impute miracles to the Lord in abundance. People who transmit the words of Jesus, "that no sign shall be given except that of Jonas," cannot think of ascribing to him whom they thus make speak special miraculous deeds.

These are the points which may be quoted as instances for the historical reality of the miracles of Jesus. This, however, cannot mean that each recorded miracle is guaranteed offhand in its historicity by such considerations. It is by no means precluded that in the tradition and in the conception of the eyewitnesses this or that fact got out of its place, and that a certain event was perceived and interpreted by them as an absolute miracle, without being entitled to such an estimate. But we may safely add,

after what Jesus himself said on the importance of his miracles, that it matters not by any means whether each individual miraculous deed of Jesus took place just so, and is to be understood just so, as the narrative reads. For the objective ascertaining of a miracle we have no sure means at our disposal. On this or that event, which the first tradition perceived as miraculous, considerations may assert themselves; considerations, indeed, of a purely historical nature, which do not admit of a certain final decision. But all this does not affect the general result to which we have come. The purely historical use of the sources already brings the probability to the line of certainty that Jesus performed real miracles.

Over against this general result we shall not omit to picture to ourselves some reflections against some miracle records which one cannot directly call unfounded. Those miracles of Jesus which were done on impersonal nature, without perceiving the motive of Jesus, or one otherwise answering to the attitude of Jesus have always caused special doubt. Such miracles would include

the stilling of the storm at sea, inasmuch as we may not assume that a real danger existed for the occupants of the boat; and Jesus himself could not doubt that the Father in heaven would not yet put an end to his work. In this case, was it really his word which quelled the storm, and did he bring it about in order to comfort the anxious disciples "of little faith"? We well understand this question; but it is not necessary to fall back upon this, that, on the supposition of the outer circumstances, the ceasing of the storm accidentally coincided with his commanding word, and the disciples explained this as a powerful deed. To us it rather seems that it was not at all against the known principles of Jesus to assist in such a condition the *little* faith of his faithful by powerful interference with the roaring elements. But how about the tribute money which he procured, and of which Matthew (17. 27) narrates? Did Jesus, indeed, have recourse to this means to procure for himself and Peter the small temple tax, since we may assume that at Capernaum, where this otherwise very credible narrative (verses 24, seq.) occurred, many a friend would

have offered to him the small gift? But, above all things, is not the supposition plainly inconceivable that a fish which snapped at the glittering piece of money should, with the coin in its mouth, take the bait? Nevertheless if the event took place according to the wording of the texts, we have not a miracle of power, but a case of the miraculous knowledge of Jesus. But the suggestion is not to be rejected that in this narrative, which only belongs to the first Gospel, a shifting of the picture from recollection has taken place. We should find it entirely suitable to the view of Jesus when he said to Peter who was in straits for the tribute money: "Catch a big fish, and you have the necessary money; that is, what you require in your calling with little trouble you will certainly not refuse to the government, which has a right to demand!" Peter acted accordingly, and held in his hands an object which represented the tribute. In this manner the affair answers to the ethical sentiment of Jesus, whereas the assumption of a miraculous procuring of the tribute money would deprive the latter of its character and could with difficulty only be brought into

harmony with the moral logic of the Lord.[1] This narrative offers a case which forces us to admit that the oral tradition in one single occurrence can only have shaped the miraculous character. The cursing of the fig tree (Matt. 21. 18-21; Mark 11. 12-14, 20-23) also causes a difficulty. The withering of the tree, according to Matthew, takes place at once before the eyes of the disciples; according to Mark the friend finds the accursed tree dried up in the evening. It has been pointed out, that such an incident cannot take place in the named season, not in the Easter time, since at this time no fruits were to be expected on the tree. Such a hint is purposeless; there are many such exceptions in the life of nature, and here it is clearly stated, at all events, that the tree was covered with leaves, and thereby invited search for fruit. Even if this event is transferred to that autumn which Jesus spent at Jerusalem, of which John speaks in chapter 7, the main difficulty is not yet touched at all; for this is contained in the serious question, whether it was worthy of the hungry Jesus to curse

[1]The author here makes a concession wholly unnecessary.—EDITOR.

the tree because he was disappointed and to make of it an example of his miraculous power? To say the least, such a way of acting cannot be reconciled with the character of Jesus as revealed to us. In consideration of this, it is only an evasion to speak of a "symbolic miracle," by which the judgment which was to come over the city of Jerusalem was to be illustrated. Should one suppose this, then none of the narrators had understood the miracle, because neither of them has any reference to this coming judgment. Above all it is and remains remarkable, that for once the wondrous power of Jesus is used for a curse, whereas it is his very singularity to use it as a blessing. With this consideration, the wondrous power of the Lord is by no means called into question, who could also naturally have performed this miracle. It is an historic argument, the observation of the transmitted portrait of Jesus, whereby the supposition is suggested that we have to do here with a combination of an actual occurrence and a word of Jesus, like the parable of the fruitless fig tree narrated only by Luke (13. 6-9). That, in this wise, a miracle record took root in

an oral tradition, is easily understood. Jesus and his disciples are near the city; he is hungry, sees a fig tree richly covered with leaves; he expects to find some fruit on it but finds it not. This tree, which disappointed him in his just hope, becomes to him a symbol of the capital which, in like manner, disappoints the religious hope; and he says, with reference to Jerusalem: "This fig tree, not bringing fruit, shall wither," just as in that parable he designates Israel as the fruitless fig tree, which is to be cut down. These examples are not intended to offer a sure decision on the respective miracle records, but that this only might become clear: that an impartial glance can meet with many difficulties which are fully intelligible and can be held in suspense without detriment to belief in the real, practical proof of the true wondrous power of Jesus.

Let us turn to the religio-historical points of view. We hereby enter upon a very large and different territory, in which we must make a scanty selection. We meet with miracles in the religious and in the profane literature of the nations in great multitudes, and we are wholly skeptical of such tradition.

In all fairness nothing entitles us, who impartially measure according to the like standard that which is historically handed down everywhere, to estimate the miracles of Jesus more favorably. In a religio-historical comparison the analogies are of the highest importance, and in miracle materials the analogies are especially strong. Through similarity in this point, the various religions seem to come very close to each other. All miracles seem to be written on the same line. Common religio-historical study follows the principle to explain all like or related phenomena in the different religions, if anywhere possible, from like causes; so also miracles. It regards all religious data as subjective. What is written in the sacred codices is considered as the product of religious feeling or judgment. If it is supposed that miracle legends originated in the desire to bring the supernatural near to the human mind, and that on this account the supernatural was added as an attribute to adored heroes, the principle requires of similarly actuated analogy that all miracles of which these religions speak were of like origin; that is, that without exception all

must be regarded as the outcome of imagination to which there is no reality. The real motive of the miracle composing imagination is thus seen in the popular longing for a concrete apprehension and description of the supernatural, which is fed by a perfect mania for miracles. From the state of the gospel writings we have already pointed out a number of signs which, according to our view, strongly support the historicity of several of the miracles of Jesus. The trend of the criticism which we oppose is to shake conviction in the historical reality of the Gospel miracles; and over against the alleged principle of the analogy referred to, a stringent scientific proof that the miracles of the Gospels are of different origin than the miracles in foreign religious traditions cannot, of course, be brought. This proof is just as little to be given absolutely as the proof for the correctness of the principle of the analogy which is only an hypothesis. But no one will assert that this principle, although it comprises a large field, is of universal validity. Everyone will rather admit that a limitless multitude of cases is conceivable which outwardly, indeed, appear as an-

alogies but which owe their existence to entirely different causes; under the supposition of this possibility we will make the following observations: Just as we previously found instances for the historicity of the miracles of Jesus according to the records, we now affirm that the motive for miracle narratives must not be considered offhand as the sole and authoritative reason for the narrative without doing violence to historical truth. Two things must here be borne in mind. In the first place this motive cannot be spoken of as a mania for miracles in a degree that it blindly received everything which is recorded of miraculous things; in the second place, the majority of the extra-canonical miracles stand in a very different relation than the canonical.

It sounds very strange that today we can "no more" believe in miracles, whereas formerly such a belief was entirely in its proper place. One thing, indeed, seems to be evident, that the modern man in general is more opposed to the acceptance of a real miracle than the man of the time of Jesus. But we must not forget that there is today also a playing with the miraculous which

differs little from the mania for miracles of the past. And, when among us, not only the desire for appearances of dead persons and communication with them is publicly made known, but also the gratification of this want is promised, as it were, in a businesslike manner, is the like desire dictated by less mania for miracles than many things which we estimate so contemptibly in the thought of an age which in its naïvete had no idea of natural happenings conformable to law? This estimate is already made invalid by the mere existence of the notion of miracle. For when the ancient age possessed the idea of miracle it held it in opposition to the idea of regular laws of nature. The idea of miracle, be it ever so confused, always includes the thought of a conflict with natural law. Thus it is also very remarkable when one asserts that the contemporaries of Jesus were less strangely affected by the raising of a dead man than we moderns would be who know that the brazen law of nature retains in death whom it once has. The people of that time knew very well that the dead remains dead. After the burial of Lazarus, Mary, the sister of the deceased,

who was intimately acquainted with Jesus, is not prepared for the idea that a resurrection is to take place. She, like those who were near her, thought, indeed, that Jesus could have cured the sick Lazarus; but the still unprecedented miracle on the dead they also regarded as impossible; and Martha wished to prevent the stone being taken from the grave (John 11. 32, 37, 39). In the Octavius of Minucius, Felix, the heathen, turns to the Christian and says: "I cannot agree to the return of the dead to life, for such a case only happened once, when Protesilaus, at the entreaties of his wife, returned for a few hours from the lower world." But this case he also ascribed to fictitious legend. A resuscitation of the dead is narrated of the great Pythagorean philosopher and itinerant preacher Apollonius of Tyana, which he performed at Rome. A girl from a noble house died on the day of her wedding and is carried out. (By the way, the similarity of the individual traits with the Gospel narrative of the raising of the widow's son at Nain is so great that the Apollonius story looks very much like an intended analogy.) Apollonius causes

them to put down the bier. "He touches the dead, speaks a few unintelligible words, and raises her from the frame." The biographer, Philostratus, who is very skeptical as to this tradition, remarks (Vita Apollonii, iv. 45): "Whether he still found in her a spark of life which the physicians did not perceive—for it is said that the god had bedewed her, and from her face ascended a vapor—or whether he called back again the extinguished life and rekindled it, I am not able to ascertain, nor could they who were present." In the Octavius mentioned already, the heathen complains of the credulity of former generations, under whose fictions the education of youth is still suffering: "Our ancestors very gladly believed in lies. Without examination they accepted as true even monstrous prodigies like the Scylla, the Chimera, etc." What do the statements here put together prove? So much, at any rate, that at the very time when Christianity stepped in beside all trifling with the miraculous, skepticism also was a powerful factor in the mental life, and endeavored to cut the very ground from under the mania for miracles. Not only educated

men, like the alleged authors, behave themselves in a critical manner toward miracles, but also the plain countrymen of Jesus were by no means especially disposed toward unprecedented miraculous events.

But, in spite of all, the wonderful stories of former times eagerly prevailed and were readily believed by the mass. In the first place, probably the god of medicine Askelepios (or, Latin, Æsculapius), the true "saviour" of the heathen who, as the son of a god and a human mother, of Apollo and Koronis, was endowed with a wonderful healing power. After he had been snatched away from the earth through the lightning of Zeus, on account of his raisings of the dead (of which ten are recorded) he still worked from divine heights, healed through the hand of priests by means of medicine, or recompensed with recovery pilgrimages to his sanctuaries. And this is only one example. There is no doubt that at that time also belief in miracles was diffused and a mania for miracles prevailed. Other instances could be quoted as supplemental; but not all must be placed to account, such as that miracles were also ascribed to Roman

emperors, for it is extremely doubtful whether the miracles were at all believed by anyone, and were not, rather, an official tune of the cult of the Cæsars. But whoever goes through history will find no reason to rate very high the hunger for miracles in the age of Christ. The mania for miracles is the constant companion of enlightenment; it is always a powerful factor in the mental life, only the manifestations are different now and then; and it must be doubtful whether among people who were educated after the pattern of the wisdom of the synagogue, or who had at least felt the breath of the wind from the wing-stroke of that great wisdom, that the disposition to believe in miracles had been exceptionally great. It is known that as never before the dogma of the Almighty God of creation was indeed emphasized in later Judaism, but that this belief exclusively referred to the creating act of the past, whereas, confident belief in the God who is present in the history of his people, and in individuals ever rules and works, had receded more and more. The God, whose name one did not pronounce, was also lost to the religious feeling; and,

although this decay of religion was in the first place a production of theology, and the pious and retired ones in the country uninfluenced by it found edification in psalms and ancient prayers, it could not be prevented that the deistic view of the educated concerning the world and God encroached on the masses. This was also unavoidable, because the temple ceremonial changed in the direction of the transcendent. From all this it must also be evident that the Jewish generation of that time also was not greatly disposed to recognize events as miraculous works of God, and it is not without difficulty to expect of the first Christian generation that without cogent facts it twined a wreath of divine deeds around the Saviour who a short time ago still lived among them, and represented these miracles as the immediate effects of God himself, as is done in the fourth Gospel. The history of our mental life shows that in such situations all manner of superstition and mystery easily springs up, which at the first time meddle with the dark powers; but this is something very different from imputing to a historical person miraculous deeds which are

said to have been wrought by a divine power and by a Divine Being. We have enough documents of that time pertaining to superstition and exorcism. At that time Jewish exorcists had especially acquired a certain reputation. Their formulas, which contained the names of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, according to the testimony of Origen (contra Celsum, iv. 33), were used by numerous non-Jewish magicians; and the "Solomonic" incantations were considered as especially efficacious. But we need only to think once more of the Apostle Paul to know how far removed even the Pharisaically educated man was from having recourse to the miracles of Jesus and thus also to the tendency of miracle fiction.

If, therefore, the greatest caution is required when, according to the analogy of the bulk of the heathenish miracles, one wishes to trace a Gospel miracle to the mania for miracles, the essential difference between the miracles of Jesus and those of other heroes must also be taken into consideration. In general, it is forcible. We recognize it in the first place by this, that the miracles of Jesus owe their origin entirely to divine love.

No real miracle can be found in the Gospels which was not a miracle of mercy. In spite of some discrepancies in the account (Mark 6. 56) the person of the miracle-worker, as such, steps back, whereas the extra-ceremonial miracles are characterized by this, that they take place and are described in glorification of the miracle-worker; and, though they are also not entirely lacking the motive of compassionate love, the person of the miracle-worker always stands in the foreground, and the miracles obtain thereby a certain proper object.

A few examples from a great mass of material may suffice. Let us commence with the miracles of the apocryphal gospel literature, and take the Gospel of Thomas, which purposes to fill the gap between the return of the carpenter's family from Egypt and the first visit to the temple by the child Jesus at the age of twelve. It commenced at once with two miracles of nature. "By his mere word," as we are expressly told, Jesus, five years old, makes muddy water, with which he played, clear; he then makes twelve sparrows of mud. When a Jew became angry because he thereby desecrated the

Sabbath, and being rebuked also by his father, the boy proves by a miracle that he did nothing wrong; he claps his hands and calls to the sparrows: "Fly away!" and off they went. The son of a scribe, who causes the water to run out which little Jesus had collected in puddles, he calls a blockhead, and impious fellow, and causes him to become withered. Another boy, who touches him by the shoulder whilst running, he causes to fall down dead, "for every word of his is a ready deed." To the reproacher, he replies that he only cures evildoers, but those become blind at once who reproached him. In this way it goes on. Here we have the grossest contrast to canonical literature. These are divine childish tricks by which the person is to be exalted. All who do not already perceive the God in the child must die. The Buddha child too, is already wonderfully bright after his birth. The newly born announces with a lion's voice his calling: "I am the sublimest, the best in the world! This is my last birth. I will make an end to birth, age, sickness, death." At this follow miracle after miracle. Buddha's very unique knowledge is always praised.

Buddha says it himself: "It is manifest unto me what occupies your mind; you cannot deceive me."

Real marvelous knowledge is recorded in numerous cases of Jesus; however, no real marvelous knowledge of human beings is transmitted, but, indeed, a surprisingly clear knowledge of human thoughts and opinions, which, according to the analogy, we are even able to comprehend, so that it is not properly miraculous. Jesus only manifests a foreknowledge of his divine calling, of the kingdom of God; but here, too, only in great lines, refusing the knowledge of details. His extraordinary knowledge is of a purely prophetical kind. The knowledge of Buddha is magical, even the cures of Buddha lie also in an entirely different sphere, and are evidently intended to glorify the person of the hero; thus he gives to a prince, whose hands and feet were cut off, and whose prayer he hears in a distance through a message by means of the sacred formulas, the full possession of his members, and the healed shows at once a superhuman power. Buddha could also cause a fearful earthquake by stamping the ground. In

these traits which are wanting in the Jesus picture of the Gospels, we feel at once the greatness of the contrast. It is not otherwise with Apollonius of Tyana. Like Buddha, he heals by special perceptive means or charms. Æsculapius, too, used for his cures sundry means; prescribed medicine; afterward the patients had to sleep in his temples and follow the direction of the dreams which they had there. It is not the divine omnipotence which worked there; we meet with a jumble of the sensually natural and supernatural. Apollonius cannot only banish a ghost, but needs the coöperation of shouting men (Vita Apollonii, ii, 7). When he wishes to deliver the city of Ephesus from the pestilence he leads the inhabitants to the statue of Apotrapacus, the calamity-averting Hercules. He also applies a morally very doubtful measure; he causes the stoning of an old man, who is to bear the cause of the epidemic; afterward, however, not a human corpse but a big dead dog is found (Vita Apollonii, iv, 11). A man suffering hydrophobia, he causes to be cured by the dog which bit him (Ibid., vi. 43). He is very superstitious; he touches the incense flames,

when their flickering seems favorable (Ibid., i, 31). Besides, an absolutely wonderful knowledge is ascribed to him. He knows the language of every nation without having studied it; from small outward events he twice prophesies the short reign of the three soldier-emperors, Galba, Otho, Vitellius. At Ephesus he suddenly stops in the conversation and sees, experiencing it himself, how at the very minute Domitian is murdered in Rome (Ibid., i, 19; v, 11-13; viii, 26). Of Apollonius, as of his great master, Pythagoras (in the biography composed by Jamblichus), it is reported that he was able to be in many places at one and the same time, or to transfer himself with celerity to another place. Such magic freedom from limits of space and material existence, is also ascribed to Buddha.

In our Gospels such traits are not found, unless one understands in this sense the walking of Jesus on the sea.

In conclusion, let us turn once again to an apocryphal writing, the Acts of Peter, where the strangest things are told of their hero; he has the power to revive a pickled herring; at his command a suckling an-

nounces with a loud voice the impending judgment on Simon Magus, and challenges him to a contest in performing miracles. Even the contest is described, and this very fact in its pregnant form, allows us to perceive the signature of the heathenish miracle view. The alleged examples make it clear how in extra-canonical sources all miracles are recorded with the view of extolling the person of the hero. Like a contention for the divinely glorified person, it often affects us, indeed, when he is raised beyond the level of the human, whereas, on the other hand, the life of the respective individual betrays nothing of the divine. This is the unique peculiarity of the extra-canonical miracle records: that the miracles do not harmonize with the type of the acting persons. The superhuman is there only too deeply buried in that which is altogether too human, and comes forth from the latter like something that should not be. When the extremely acute Apollonius, who was endowed with superhuman knowledge, is involved in different popular superstitions, when he even applies immoral means in his miraculous help, we become confused. It is

bad inconsistency which we find in the view forming the basis of such records. The heathenish "saviours" are said to perform cures which defy every human medical science; but when they apply to these divine deeds the genuinely human means of medicine, magic, and incantations, ceremonial washings, etc., this, too, is an inconsistency which allows us to see how the whole picture comes from the view of those who designed it. This inconsistency of view is not perceptible in the Gospels. Here, as we have seen, the miracles of Jesus appear as the true consequence of the entire being and calling of Jesus. To the other "heroes" the miraculous adheres like an official gown, like an ornament or insignia. Christ's personal life and work is a miracle. They were magnified through the miracles; Christ is so great that the miracle becomes small in comparison with him.[1] And, whereas in the heathen miracle narratives the heroes act from a certain egotistical fullness of heart, and gladly exhibit miraculous gift, we find nothing of this in the portrait of Jesus in the Gospels.

[1] R. Seeberg, Grundwahrheiten der ChristlichenReligion, p. 50.

Unspeakably great is the contrast of this simple and sublime personality with all world heroes, all legendary lords and saviours of mythology. He, Jesus the Christ and Lord of men, rises above all and yet in our endeavor to fully apprehend him he gladly remains in secret with his deeds of love and service.